



May 2018

## Mental Health Awareness Month



May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Mental Health Awareness Month was started in the United States in 1949 by the Mental Health America organization. The 2018 theme is **Fitness #4Mind4Body**.

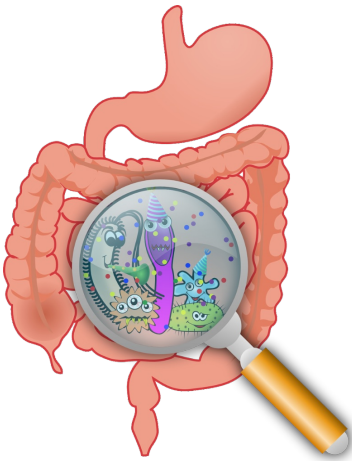
During the month of May, the focus is on making steps that lead to a healthy mind and body.

- There is an important link between the gut and the brain, so keeping a healthy diet can keep them working in sync properly.
- Proper sleeping habits will keep both your body and mind from fatigue.
- Stress can lead to both mental and physical symptoms so everyone

should learn techniques to manage the stressors in their daily lives.

SOURCE INFORMATION: <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may>

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# The Gut-Brain Connection

## What Is “The Gut”?

- The gut includes every organ involved in digesting food and processing it into waste. The lining of your gut is often called “the second brain.”

## How Is The Gut Connected To The Brain?

- The gut or “second brain” can operate on its own and communicates back and forth with your actual brain.
- The vagus nerve controls messages to the gut as well as the heart, lungs, and other vital organs. This is the gut’s direct connection to the brain.
- The gut also connects with the brain through chemicals like hormones and neurotransmitters that send messages.
- The chemical messages that pass between the gut and the brain can be affected by the bacteria, viruses, and fungi that live in the gut called the “gut microbiome.” The bacteria, viruses, and fungi that live in the gut may be beneficial, harmless, or harmful.

## How Is The Gut Microbiome Related To Mental Health?

- There is a strong relationship between having mental health problems and having gastrointestinal symptoms like heartburn, indigestion, acid reflux, bloating, pain, constipation, and/or diarrhea.
- Research in animals has shown that changes in the gut microbiome and inflammation in the gut can affect the brain and cause symptoms that look like Parkinson’s disease, autism, anxiety and depression.
- Having anxiety and depression can cause changes in the gut microbiome because of what happens in the body when it has a stress response.

## Tips For Taking Care Of Your Gut

- Eating a balanced and nutritious diet is the most important thing a person can do to keep their gut healthy.
- Eat a diet full of whole grains, lean meats, fish, fruits, and vegetables.
- Don’t base your diet on sugary, fried, or processed foods and soft drinks.

## Prebiotics and Probiotics

- Prebiotics are foods that the good bacteria, viruses, and fungi that live in the gut need to help them grow. Prebiotic foods are high in fiber and work best when they are raw. Try asparagus, bananas (especially if they aren’t quite ripe), garlic, onions, or jicama. Tomatoes, apples, berries and mangos are also good prebiotic choices.



- Probiotics are live bacteria that exist in foods. Examples of probiotic foods are yogurt (the label should say live or active cultures), unpasteurized sauerkraut and kimchi, miso soup, kefir (a yogurt-like beverage), kombucha (fermented black tea), tempeh (made of soy beans), and apple cider vinegar.

## Other Tips

- Avoid taking antibiotics unless your doctor says they are absolutely necessary. Antibiotics kill bad bacteria, but also kill the good bacteria that keeps your gut working properly.
- If you have gut problems like an upset stomach or unusual bathroom habits that don't go away it is important to see a doctor. Start with your primary care doctor. They may recommend you see a specialist called a gastroenterologist.

**Trying to Eat Better? Try using this worksheet to help make changes easier.**

SOURCE: <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/fitness-4mind4body-gut-brain-connection>



# Sleep

## How Does Sleep Affect Your Mental Health?

- Sleep deprivation impairs our ability to think clearly. Essentially, when deep sleep is disrupted, it wreaks havoc on our brains and impairs our ability to think clearly and remember things.
- Driver fatigue can be as dangerous as driving intoxicated. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, driver fatigue is responsible for about 100,000 motor vehicle accidents and 1,500 deaths every year.
- Sleep concerns may be more likely to affect those with existing mental health conditions. It is worth noting that chronic sleep problems affect about 50 to 80 percent of those with psychiatric conditions and 10 to 18 percent of adults in the general U.S. population.
- There are many symptoms associated with sleep deprivation: constant tiredness, habitually using caffeine to get through the day, not waking up refreshed, drowsiness while driving or during mundane activities like watching TV, memory problems, waking up too early and difficulty falling or staying asleep.
- Trouble sleeping is a symptom of depression. Sleep problems are not only a symptom of depression, but also a contributor to it.
- Sleep concerns are associated with ADHD in both children and adults: Various sleep problems affect 25 to 50 percent of children with ADHD – the more common conditions are daytime tiredness and sleep-disordered breathing. For adults with ADHD, the typical issues are difficulty falling asleep, shorter sleep duration and restless slumber. The symptoms of ADHD and sleep problems overlap so much that it may be difficult to tell them apart.

## How Much Sleep Should You Be Getting?

- The amount of sleep you need each night depends on your age. The National



NEWBORNS (0-3 MONTHS)		14-17 HOURS	9-11 HOURS		SCHOOL CHILDREN (6-13 YEARS)
INFANTS (4-11 MONTHS)		12-15 HOURS	8-10 HOURS		TEENS (14-17 YEARS)
TODDLERS (1-2 YEARS)		11-14 HOURS	7-9 HOURS		ADULTS (18-64 YEARS)
PRE-SCHOOLERS (3-5 YEARS)		10-13 HOURS	7-8 HOURS		OLDER ADULTS (65+ YEARS)

## Good Quality Of Sleep Means:

- Being asleep for at least 85% of the time you are in bed.
- Falling asleep in 30 minutes or less.
- Waking up no more than once per night for no longer than 20 minutes.
- Poor quality of sleep can increase the risk of developing mental health symptoms like: manic episodes, a first episode of psychosis, paranoia, anxiety, and depression.
- Sleep problems affect 50% to 80% of people under the care of a psychiatrist, compared with 10% to 18% of adults in the general U.S. population.

## Tips For A Good Night's Sleep

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day—including weekends. This helps to keep your body's natural rhythms running on schedule.
- Get out in the sun. Getting natural sunlight during the day helps to maintain your body's sleep-wake cycle. Aim for 30 minutes of sun exposure and be sure to wear sunscreen.
- Limit caffeine to the morning. The energy-boosting effects of caffeine can take as long as 8 hours to wear off.
- Don't eat right before bed - it can cause indigestion and heartburn, which can mess up sleep.
- Nap smart. If you need a nap, take it before 3 p.m. and limit it to an hour.
- If you can't fall asleep for more than 20 minutes after going to bed, get up and do something calming until you feel sleepy.
- Some over-the-counter and prescription medications may affect your ability to go to sleep or cause you to sleep for longer than necessary. If you can't avoid medications, talk to your doctor about changing your dose or the time you take your medicine.
- Get rid of anything in your bedroom that might distract you from sleep, like noises or bright lights. The light from screens can confuse your body's internal clock.
- Go easy on the drinks. Drinking too much before bed can make you wake up to go to the bathroom and alcohol gets in the way of reaching the deep and restful stages of sleep.

**Trying to Get Better Sleep? Try using this worksheet to help make changes easier.**





# Stress

## Stress and Mental Health

- Stress hormones may decrease the functioning of brain cells in important regions of the brain. As a result, people who are chronically stressed may experience confusion, difficulty concentrating, trouble learning new information, and/or problems with decision-making.
- Some people experience personality changes in response to stress hormones, which are part of their internal environment. The following changes in personality are not uncommon to observe in people who are stressed: irritability, hostility, frustration, anger, problems in communication, social withdrawal/isolation, and impulsivity.

## Why Do We Feel Stressed?

- Stress is a normal part of life. You can feel stress in your body when you have too much to do or when you haven't slept well. You can also feel stress when you worry about things like your job, money, relationships, or a friend or family member who is struggling with illness or difficult circumstances.
- In response to these strains, your body releases chemicals that cause increases in blood pressure, heart rate, breathing, availability of cell energy, and blood flow to your muscles. At the same time, it also releases chemicals to slow down less urgent bodily functions that deal with digestion, growth, sex, and aspects of the immune system.
- These stress responses are intended to help your body react quickly and effectively to dangerous or high-pressure situations - known as the "fight or flight" reaction - and were especially important when our ancestors were living in the wilderness, facing exposure to predators and extreme weather conditions.

## When Stress Doesn't Let Up

- When stress comes and goes relatively quickly, the body can return to functioning in a normal, healthy way. When you are constantly reacting to stressful situations (chronic stress), cells in your immune system can cause inflammation that doesn't go away.
- Chronic stress and inflammation have been linked to reduced ability to fight off viruses (from HIV to the common cold), and increased risk for heart disease, headaches, intestinal problems, sexual dysfunction, diabetes, and even cancer.

## Tips For Dealing with Stress

- Be realistic: You may be taking on more responsibility than you can or should handle for yourself or your family. If you feel overwhelmed by how many things are on your schedule, it's ok to say "No" to new activities! You may also decide to stop doing an activity that is not 100% necessary. If friends or family criticize your decisions, give reasons why you're making the changes. If you are a parent and your kids' activities are part of your stress, be willing to listen to their concerns and stay open to compromise.
- No one is perfect: Shed the "superman/superwoman" urge. Don't expect perfection from yourself or others. Ask yourself, What really needs to be done? How much can I do? Is the deadline realistic? What adjustments can I make? Don't hesitate to ask for help if you need it.
- Meditate: Just 10-20 minutes of quiet reflection may bring relief from chronic stress as well as increase your tolerance to it. Use the time to listen to music, relax, and try to think of pleasant things (or nothing at all).

- **Visualize:** Use your imagination and picture how you can manage a stressful situation more successfully. Whether it's a business presentation or moving to a new place, many people feel visual rehearsals boost self-confidence and help them to take a more positive approach to a different task.
- **One thing at a time:** For people under tension or stress, their day-to-day workload can sometimes seem unbearable. You may feel like you have to multi-task, but that often leads to more stress. Take on task at a time. Make a list of things you need to get done and start with one task. Once you accomplish that task, move on to the next one. The feeling of checking items off a list is very satisfying and can motivate you to keep going.
- **Exercise:** Regular exercise is a popular way to relieve stress. It gives an outlet to the energy your body makes when it is preparing for a "fight or flight" response to stress or danger. Twenty to thirty minutes of physical activity benefits both the body and the mind.

Trying to Manage Stress? Try using this worksheet to help make changes easier.

SOURCE: <https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/mental-and-emotional-impact-of-stress/>  
<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/fitness-4mind4body-stress>

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# Stay Happy and Healthy!





The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project has partnered with The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey to help you learn more about health, wellness, and being the best you! We are happy to tailor our presentation(s) to suit the needs of your group. The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project Team will visit your location and provide free workshops on the following topics:



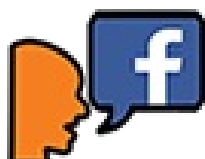
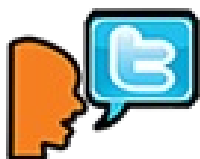
Don't see what you're looking for? We'll make it for you!  
E-mail [NJSAP@ArcNJ.org](mailto:NJSAP@ArcNJ.org) or call 732-749-8514 to schedule a training at your location!



*The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey*

The Healthy Lifestyles Project (HLP) is a program of The Arc of New Jersey and receives funding through a grant awarded by The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey.

For more information on HLP and NJSAP  
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# New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project

A program of The Arc of New Jersey since 1983

Promoting Advocacy and Independence for People  
with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities